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THE FIGHT FOR THE CALIPHATE.

BY WALTER F. BULLOCK.

UNDER the obscure heading of "Rebellion in the Yemen," a series of brief telegrams has recently appeared in the British and American press, describing in skeleton language the exploits of Sheik Hamid Eddin, the Sovereign of Hadramaut, against the troops of the Turkish Sultan. Absorbed in the contemplation of the Far-Eastern struggle, neither the writers nor readers of the newspapers have yet found leisure to reflect upon the meaning of the movement, which the Lord of the Land of Frankincense is leading, or to observe that the apparently insignificant events in the southwestern corner of Arabia are probably fraught with epochal importance for the Mohammedan world. They have assumed, and the assumption is encouraged by the nonchalant pose of Stamboul, that the Yemen troubles are merely the result of local discontent on the part of a horde of hungry Arabs, and that, consequently, the whole affair may be relegated to the interminable category of petty revolts against the authority of the Sultan's agents. But the Government in Constantinople, though it would fain throw dust in the eyes of Europe, is itself painfully conscious of the menacing character of the challenge which has gone forth from Arabia. It is, indeed, impossible for it any longer to doubt that Hamid Eddin, the namesake of Abdul Hamid, is contesting not only the possession of Yemen, but also the spiritual supremacy of Islam. A Holy War, in fact, has started in Arabia, and upon its issue depend the fate of Mecca and the title of Caliph.

That title, and with it the Command of the Faithful, has been associated with the Turkish sovereign for nearly four centuries. In 1517, after the suppression of the Mameluke rising and the conquest of Egypt, Sultan Selim I wrested from the fainting

hands of the descendants of the Abassides the banner of the Prophet—Sandjak-i-Cherif—which, after many migrations, had been transferred from Bagdad to Cairo. From Cairo, the Ottoman monarch conveyed the sacred symbol to the Serail in Constantinople, where it has since reposed as the outward and visible sign of the spiritual power of the Throne. So long as the might of Turkey remained intact, no serious attempt was made to dispute the right of its sovereign to the dignity of the Caliphate. But in recent years, since the weakness of the Sultanate became patent to the world, increasing numbers of zealous Moslems have favored the idea of removing the religious authority from Constantinople to Arabia. The representatives of "Young Turkey" have been especially active in the secret propagation of this idea.

On the high plateau of Hadramaut, which faces on the Arabian Sea, and amid the hills of Yemen dwell the proud descendants of the Koreishites, who held sway in Mecca before the birth of the Prophet. Always tenacious of their independence, they have at no time yielded absolutely to their successive conquerors. More than once they have caused the Sultans of Turkey to tremble for the possession of the holy cities, which are indeed kept open more by bribery than by the display of actual power. Since 1872, it is true, the Yemen has been under the nominal sovereignty of the Turks, who have established garrisons in many of its chief cities. But Hadramaut has preserved its freedom inviolate. Its inhabitants have witnessed the ruinous results of Turkish misgovernment, and have learned from their own observation, and from the information conveyed to them by Turkish refugees, of the economical progress made by Islamitic countries, such as Egypt, Herzegovina and Bosnia, under an efficient administration. The Sultan, by systematically banishing to the southern shores of the Red Sea those of his officials who are politically disaffected, has himself contributed, in no small degree, to the enlightenment of the Arabians and to the revival of their national consciousness. For those officials have eagerly sympathized with the ambitions of the Koreishites. They have assisted diligently in the effort to secure the recognition of the ruler of Hadramaut as Commander of the Faithful; and their efforts have been supported by the Ecclesiastical High School of Egypt, El Azhar, which many years ago decreed that the Sultan of Turkey had forfeited all right to the Caliphate. Now the sovereign of Hadramaut, the Sheik

Hamid Eddin, claims to be a direct descendant of the Prophet. This the Sultan also is; but, while the family tree of the Padishah springs from the younger, or Hussein, line of Mohammed, Hamid Eddin is acknowledged by the Ulemas to derive his rights from the purer and superior Hassan line. Hamid Eddin seems to have gained the enthusiastic support of the inhabitants of the Southern half of Arabia, and to number among his allies many powerful Sheiks in the central parts of the Peninsula.

For several years, the propaganda proceeded on comparatively peaceful lines. Only occasionally was it marked by collisions with the Turkish troops. But, towards the end of 1903, the Sheik entered the northern district of the Yemen and laid siege to the Turkish garrison of Assyr. The engagement ended disastrously for the Turks. Their Governor and Military Commander and a large proportion of their troops, who numbered altogether one thousand men, were killed. Those of the Turkish soldiers who preserved their lives joined the forces of Hamid Eddin. The news of the disaster fell like a bomb in Constantinople, and arrangements were hastily made for the despatch of considerable reinforcements to the Vilayet of Yemen. It is difficult to follow in any detail the subsequent movements of the Arabian Pretender. According to Ali Nouri Bey, who enjoys exceptional sources of information, the occupation of Assyr was in the nature of a reconnaissance in force. After the battle, Hamid Eddin returned to the South. Avoiding the larger garrisons of the Turks, he captured a number of smaller towns, the inhabitants of which invariably hailed him as their Liberator, and paid homage to him as the true Caliph. For a whole year the Turks refrained from attempting any serious resistance to the Arabian movement. In February of this year, however, they succeeded in inflicting on Hamid Eddin a slight reverse, which the authorities in Constantinople, for political reasons, at once magnified into a disaster. The real truth appears to be that a small Arabian force, stationed at Menakha, a village situated between Saana, the city of many towers, and Hodeida, the chief port of the Vilayet, was compelled, after fighting for forty-eight hours, to evacuate its positions. Of these the Turks took possession, and in Constantinople it was forthwith announced that the main body of the Arabs had been dispersed. The resolution taken by the Sultan, immediately after the event, to send out twenty-two additional

battalions to the scene of operations, showed plainly enough, however, that notwithstanding the battle of Menakha, he still regarded the situation as critical. Nor was Hamid Eddin long in avenging the blow his men had suffered. In the south of the Vilayet, where he had assembled his forces, he seized the important towns of Taiz and Kataba, thus making himself master of the lower half of the Yemen. From Kataba the caravan road from Aden to Mecca is controlled. Advancing quickly along that highway, Hamid Eddin laid siege to Saana, the capital city of Happy Yemen, which was held by a Turkish garrison of five thousand men. The city, cut off from all communication with Menakha, where considerable bodies of Turkish troops were garrisoned, sent offers of conditional capitulation to the Sheik. But Hamid Eddin, conscious of his strength, calmly demanded the absolute surrender of the stronghold. The condition of the city had already become desperate when the news of its distress reached Constantinople. Peremptory orders were despatched to Marshal Riza Pasha, who was at Hodeida organizing the Turkish reinforcements, to relieve the capital at all costs. Towards the end of March, accordingly, the Marshal left Hodeida at the head of an army, the exact composition of which, in view of the discreet taciturnity of Constantinople, it is impossible to state with confidence. What is officially admitted is that the Marshal was in command of six thousand regulars, in addition to a formidable body of Syrian reserves, which had been gradually drafted to the Yemen. The number of these reserves is estimated by Ali Nouri Bey at from twelve to fifteen thousand. The army of Marshal Riza Pasha was well equipped with artillery, including thirty quick-firing guns, and it was followed by a large train, with a liberal supply of camels. Selecting Menakha as his base, the Turkish commander advanced against the Arabs, but failed to penetrate their line of investment. He was, in fact, completely outgeneralled by Hamid Eddin, who, by a masterly flanking movement, severed his communications with Menakha, and finally encircled his army. Riza Pasha himself, with one thousand men, temporarily escaped captivity by cutting his way to Saana, which he had set out to relieve. The bulk of the Turkish troops surrendered to the Arab Sheik, with all their arms, artillery and stores; and a few days later, between the 23rd and 26th of April, Saana also was reduced to submission.

Its capitulation impressed the Turkish Government as an event of the most sinister significance. In the early days of May, men of prominence in Constantinople might have been heard arguing that the problem of retaining possession of the European provinces was a matter of trifling importance compared with the sacred duty of restoring order in the Yemen. The Sultanate, they contended, must devote all its energies to the suppression of the Arabian movement, and abandon Macedonia rather than permit the Koreishites to extend their sway. These voices were not devoid of effect; for, though the troops in Macedonia were left intact, orders were immediately issued for the organization of a new expeditionary army, to consist of sixty battalions.

It is, to say the least, doubtful if this expeditionary force will ever reach its destination. Apart from the probability that the port of Hodeida is the next objective of the Arabs, who are now excellently armed, the difficulties of transport opposing the realization of the Turkish plans are of a most formidable nature. The Mecca railway is unfinished, and of ships there is an altogether inadequate supply. Moreover, the tone of the Turkish army is the reverse of favorable to the successful prosecution of the campaign. In the battles of April, the troops of Marshal Riza Pasha notoriously failed to do their duty.

It may be that the Albanian guards, some of whom are also proceeding to Yemen, will impart a more strenuous aspect to the struggle. But the fact cannot be blinked that many regiments show suspicious signs of a desire to shirk the orders for mobilization. While they would obey with alacrity a command to march against the Bulgarians, they are profoundly averse to fighting their Arabian brothers.

The forces of Hamid Eddin, on the other hand, are inspired by fanatical zeal. They are still distinguished by the warlike qualities which Gibbon so eloquently described in the "Decline and Fall." Now, as in the days to which the Roman historian referred, they advance to battle with the hope of victory before them, and in the rear the assurance of retreat. They are able—as the Mad Mullah has proved in another land—to "elude the search of the fleetest enemy," and at all times to "discover a safe refuge in the heart of the burning solitude, while the troops of the foe are consumed with thirst, hunger and fatigue." Add to this the circumstance that they are plentifully equipped with

modern arms, obtained, many of them, from the vanquished army of Riza Pasha, and it will be seen that the orders, issued from Constantinople, to replace the Crescent over the Towers of Saana have but faint prospect of realization. Men who are acquainted with the origin of the Arabian movement prophesy, indeed, that, within the space of two or three months, the period appointed by the Sultan for the recapture of the lost capital, the Koreishite warriors will be seen in the streets of Hodeida. Nor is the time far distant, they think, when Hamid Eddin will be in a position to march along the great highway as far as Mecca, where it will be an easy task for him to intercept the Imperial caravan, and to guard the approaches to the Caaba against all pilgrims who may refuse to acknowledge his Caliphate.

I have indicated above that Hamid Eddin is allied with some of the Sheiks of Central Arabia. Without their cooperation, his enterprise would probably be fruitless. Of this the Sultan appears to be keenly aware. Accordingly, he is endeavoring to second the exertions of his soldiers by a judicious administration of promises and bribes. But in the choice of his agents the Caliph of Stamboul is singularly unfortunate. He has, moreover, dissipated their trust in his powers by his signal inability to fulfil his promises. Of this, the case of the Sultan of Nejd affords a typical instance. About the middle of the nineties, Ben Raschid, then an independent sovereign, appealed to the Sultan of Turkey for protection against the supposed designs of Great Britain on Koweit and its neighboring territories. Abdul Hamid invited the Sultan to visit him. This Ben Raschid did, and at Constantinople he was accorded a demonstrative welcome. When he returned to his dominions he was accompanied by a Turkish escort, which remained in Nejd as a substantial pledge of Turkish suzerainty. But the Turkish agents grossly neglected the political interests of the Sultanate. The Sheik of Koweit refused to acknowledge the suzerain powers of Nejd, and in deliberate disobedience to the wishes of Constantinople entered into relations of the closest friendship with Great Britain. Among the inhabitants of Nejd, which is the most populous state in Arabia, the most profound discontent prevailed against the Turcophil policy of their ruler. Internal troubles soon added to the embarrassments of Ben Raschid. The leader of the Wahabites, Ben Said, acting, it is believed, with the connivance of Hamid Eddin, profited by these

embarrassments to attack Nejd. He gained an easy victory over Ben Raschid and conquered the cities of Oneisa and El-Bereida. Ben Raschid at once demanded increased assistance from Constantinople; but the help he thus received was altogether inadequate. The troops of the Sultan were again defeated, and Ben Raschid, who was himself wounded, was compelled to fly for refuge to Hail. Since then, Ben Said has given abundant evidences of his power. He is said to have cooperated with Hamid Eddin at Assyr, and to be preparing to support that ruler in his march on Mecca and Medina. The knell of Turkish dominion and influence in Arabia will be sounded on the day when the leaders of the Koreishites and Wahabites gain control of the treasures and relics of the sacred cities.

It is, perhaps, natural that the Turkish Government should attribute its troubles to a wrong cause. Instead of seeking the origin of the Arabian movement in its own weakness and in the corruption of its agents, who have terribly abused their authority, it now accuses Great Britain of being the author of its misfortunes. It asserts that Great Britain is weaving a vast web of intrigue against the spiritual power of the Sultan-Caliph, with the object of transferring the Caliphate to the Khedive of Egypt, who would exercise its functions and influence in accordance with British designs. To this end, British agents, they assert, have fomented the Arabian rebellion, by supplying the Koreishites with arms from Aden, and by encouraging the Sheik of Koweit and Ben Said to work for the foundation of an independent Central Arabian Kingdom. The anti-British cry has been vigorously reechoed in the German press, which is oppressed with the nightmare of a British occupation of Koweit and Basra—the future termini of the Bagdad Railway—and of an independent Arabian Power threatening the security of that railway. Grave remonstrances have, accordingly, been addressed by various writers to Great Britain, which is alleged to be playing with the fire of Mohammedan fanaticism. The chief authority for these assertions is Mustafa Kamel Pasha, who is described in Germany as an “Egyptian patriot,” distinguished by unusual insight and knowledge. Moslems, says this zealous Pasha, have long been aware that it is the ambition of Great Britain to realize the dream of the first Napoleon, “*en mettant la main sur le Chalifat et ayant la domination morale de tous les Musulmans.*” But the

Khedive, he sententiously adds, will never consent to be the tool of Great Britain. On the contrary, his sympathies in this matter are with his people, who, in common with all true Moslems, are furiously indignant at the "traitorous" action of the Arabs. A characteristic Teutonic vision has arisen out of the words of Mustafa Kamel Pasha, who is depicted as foreshadowing a pan-Islamitic rising of terrible portent against British influence in India and Egypt. Unfortunately for the German visionaries, Mustafa Kamel Pasha is the reverse of a reliable witness. As the spokesman of the Turkish Caliph, it is perhaps his duty to misrepresent the facts of the situation, which is in reality governed very largely from Egypt. But, far from exciting the indignation of the subjects of the Khedive, the Arabian movement, as he probably knows, has derived from them a considerable share of its inspiration. I have even heard it suggested that an illustrious Egyptian Princess is personally responsible for its inception, and that not long ago the Khedive, on her advice, signified his readiness to accept the dignity of the Caliphate at the hands of Hamid Eddin. The scheme was upset, however, for obvious reasons, by the British Government. It was, too, the material progress made by Egypt, under an honest administration, that first opened the eyes of the Arabs to the misery of the Turkish rule. From Egypt they derived the conviction that Islam is not necessarily synonymous with backwardness in the arts and sciences of civilization. And Egypt, moreover, through the pronouncements of its High Schools and Ulemas, furnished the legal foundation of their claim to the Caliphate. Great Britain has in no sense encouraged the Arabian pretensions; but, on the other hand, she most assuredly has not discouraged them. Why, indeed, should she? Since the Russo-Turkish war, the religious influence of the Sultan has been uniformly exerted for the benefit of Russia against Great Britain. The destruction of that influence, therefore, disastrous as might be its consequences for Turkey, will be no loss to Great Britain, which, after the proclamation of the Arabian Caliphate, may not inconceivably be asked to guarantee the existence of an independent kingdom, embracing the central and southern portions of the peninsula.

By acceding to this request, Great Britain would enormously increase her moral influence in the Mohammedan world.

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